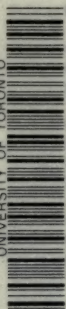


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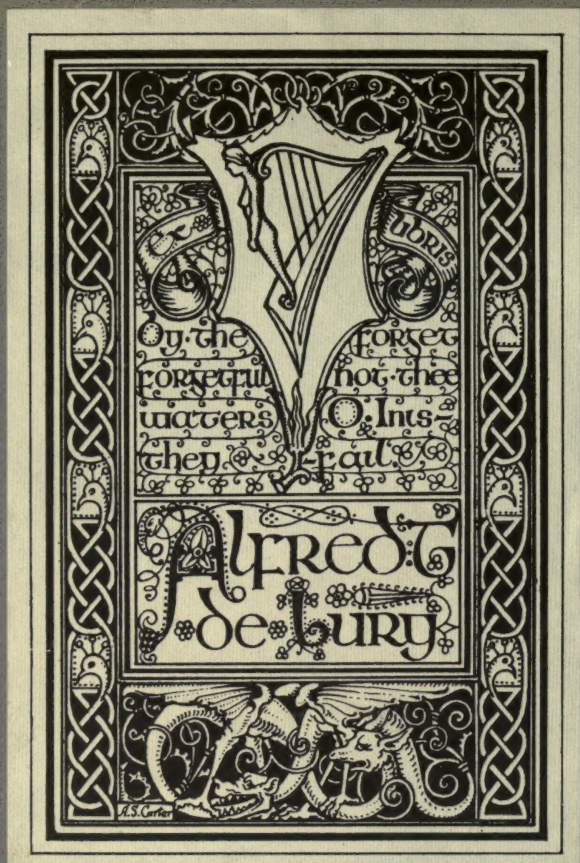
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A.S. Carter

S T U D I E S
By Padraic Colum
Being Number Two of the
Tower Press Booklets
Second Series



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Dublin

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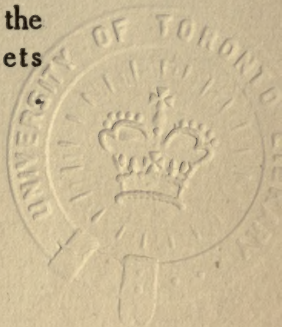
S T U D I E S

By Padraic Colum

Being Number Twond of the

Tower Press Booklets

Second Series



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96 Middle Abbey Street,
Dublin . . . 1907



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To H. L.

Is buaine focail na toice an traosail.

I beg to make the usual acknowledgments to the Editors of *The United Irishman*, and *The Celtic Christmas*, in whose journals the two Studies—"The Miracle of the Corn" and "Eilis"—originally appeared.

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SHEELA	<i>His Wife</i>
PAUDEEN	<i>A Fool</i>
AISLINN	<i>A Child</i>
SHAWN	<i>A Poor Man</i>

WOMEN.

THE MIRACLE OF THE CORN.

A Miracle Play. In One Act.

A farmer's home in the old time. The entrance is at the back right, and the hearth takes up nearly the whole of the left side. There is a room door above the hearth. In the back are three bins for holding corn, and there are shelves above them. On the shelves are wooden vessels, some of them massive, with hoops round them. There is a little window right, and beside it hangs a shrine for the Virgin. A Rosary of great beads hangs from the shrine. There are benches round the hearth, and the table is down from the bins. The house is empty. Then Fardorrougha and Paudeen come in. Fardorrougha is a tall man, and he is dressed with comfort. Paudeen is half-witted. He has ragged clothes, and hide sandals are bound to his feet.

PAUDEEN

Will the cows ever be quiet, Fardorrougha?
Will they never quit their moaning?

FARDORROUGHA

We could drive the cows to another place only the house wouldn't be safe if the people knew that Fardorrougha had left it.

PAUDEEN

The people are worse off than the cows. The people have to be watching the rain, and it falling all the day.

FARDORROUGHA

We can have some hay for the cows. Get them the hay that the widow of Shemus saved.

PAUDEEN

Is it the hay that's under the hurdles behind the hedge?

FARDORROUGHA

Ay. She put them beasts on me, and she owes me their fattening.

[Aislinn comes out of the room. Aislinn is a girl of twelve]

FARDORROUGHA

What child is this?

AISLINN

Aislinn is my name.

FARDORROUGHA

Aislinn! Aislinn! Who gave you that name? Who named you Dream?

AISLINN

It was Sheela who brought me here to keep her company.

FARDOROUGH

You're welcome to keep her company. Can you do things about a house ?

AISLINN

I can sweep the floor, and put down a fire, and mind the children.

FARDOROUGH

There are no children here. Are you afraid of me ?

AISLINN

No, Fardorrougha, I'm not afraid of you.

FARDOROUGH

You're like the brown bird in the cage, Aislinn.

AISLINN

What has Sheela on her little altar ! (*She stands back that she may see into the shrine.*) It's the Mother herself that is there ! O why will the black rain keep on falling, Mother of God !

[*Sheela comes down. Fardorrougha and Paudeen go out. Aislinn goes to Sheela.*]

AISLINN

The rain is still falling. O why will the black rain keep on falling ? It's destroyed the corn before it was out of the ground. Why will it be falling now ?

SHEELA

It's the will of God.

AISLINN

God's will is against the cattle in the fields even. Do you not hear them moaning. It's a wonder He has forgotten them. It was they that stood by His crib.

SHEELA

Do not be listening to their moaning nor watching the rain falling.

[She takes Aislinn to her.]

AISLINN

God has not forgotten you, generous woman.

SHEELA

(Fervently.) He has not forgotten me.

AISLINN

If he left your fields to the black rain he knew that you had a good roof and riches under it.

SHEELA

To have roof and store is not a sign that God remembers one. Often I used to look on my house and riches, and say, "You have forgotten me, my God."

AISLINN

Used you to say that, woman of Fardorrougha?

SHEELA

I used to say it. And when I'd look on my fields and they heavy with corn, I would say, "You have remembered the dumb furrows, and they are fruitful, but you have forgotten me, my God."

AISLINN

Was it when there was corn that he forget you?

SHEELA

It was, and now that He has forgotten the furrows, He has remembered me. O little Aislinn, put your arms round me, I would have you near me, your face before me. I would have another face like yours, Aislinn, but glad, glad, and bright.

[Paudeen comes in. He goes to the bins.]

PAUDEEN

(Opening first bin.) That's empty, and that'll take some filling. *(Opening second bin.)* That's empty, and that'll hold something. *(Opening third bin.)* That's empty, and you could put more than a cap full in that.

[He unhooks, so that the fronts of each bin fall outward. They are seen to be empty. Paudeen takes his cap off, and dusts out each bin with it.]

SHEELA

What are you doing at the bins, Paudeen?

PAUDEEN

There's going to be corn put in them. "Better have the corn in the bins than in the barn," says himself to me, "after what happened last night," says he.

SHEELA

(*Rising.*) And what was it happened, Paudeen?

PAUDEEN

"And only Gorav, the good dog, got the man by the throat," says he, "there'd be a thief in the parish and a poor man," says he.

SHEELA

The hard, hard man.

PAUDEEN

"There's a strong door in my house," says he, "and let Gorav mind what'll be left in the barn, and if the priest can't put the fear of God into the people maybe Gorav can," says he.

[*Paudeen hooks up fronts and closes bins.*]

PAUDEEN

"And," says he, "go in and see if the bins be empty."

[*Paudeen raises the lids again.*]

PAUDEEN

(*Muttering.*) That's empty, that's empty, that's empty.
[*He trots off.*]

SHEELA

He has all the corn in the place, and sets brutes to mind it. The people bring him their cattle even before he gives them corn.

AISLINN

I'm not afeard of Fardorrougha.

SHEELA

O he's not set in hardness yet. He'll give back in armfulls what he took in his hands.

AISLINN

Will it be long until then, Sheela ?

SHEELA

Not long, not long. The fruit is ripening that will bring him to himself, and O Aislinn, do not think too hard of my man. There was no child about our house, Aislinn.

[Fardorrougha and Paudeen come to the door, Paudeen carrying a sack of corn.]

FARDORROUGHA

Set it down there, Paudeen ; then go and watch the barn till I go out.

[Paudeen puts the sack down and goes out.]

FARDORROUGHA

Woman of the house, be careful to put the big bolt on the door when it gets dark.

SHEELA

Let it not come between you and your rest,
Fardorrougha.

FARDORROUGHA

I grudge parting with the corn even for what the
people bring.

SHEELA

Look at Aislinn here! Wouldn't you let it all
go with the wind to have a child like her for your
own.

FARDORROUGHA

Woman, content yourself with what God has
given.

SHEELA

He has given house and mill, land and riches,
but not content.

FARDORROUGHA

Let what is dead rest.

SHEELA

(*Holding Aislinn to her.*) Aislinn was with me
all the day. Aislinn will fill the bin for you.
Aislinn, take a noggin off the dresser, and empty
the sack.

[*Aislinn takes a vessel, and empties the
the corn from the sack to the middle bin.*]

FARDORROUGHA

(Watching her.) Aislinn, Aislinn ! It was a woman named her Dream.

SHEELA

She's a biddable child, and good about the house.

FARDORROUGHA

She needn't do much here.

SHEELA

O Fardorrougha, isn't it a comfort to see a child that isn't white-faced ? Isn't it a comfort to see a child at all. Think of a glad, bright child, Fardorrougha !

FARDORROUGHA

Let you not think on the like any more. That world has gone by, I tell you. There is only the black ragged sky, the poor wasted ground, the broken-spirited people, and the broken things like Pauden and you and me.

SHEELA

(Putting her hand before her eyes.) No, Fardorrougha. Listen to me, Fardorrougha !

FARDORROUGHA

Well ?

SHEELA

I've something to tell you, Fardorrougha.

FARDORROUGHA

Sure, I'm listening, woman.

[Paudeen rushes in. He has wisps of hay.]

PAUDEEN

(Rapidly.) Shawn of the bog is on the pass before the barn.

FARDORROUGHA

Before the barn? Is it for me he's looking?

PAUDEEN

It's for the woman of the house he's asking. "Is she by herself?" says he.

FARDORROUGHA

(Hardening.) She's not by herself, if that's the chance he's looking for *(he turns to Sheela)*. There's something else you would have said, maybe. "Loose the corn you've gathered." Let you never say it or the hard word may be between us.

PAUDEEN

And what'll I say to Shawn, Fardorrougha?

FARDORROUGHA

I'll see Shawn myself, and if it's a fair bargain he wants it's with myself he can make it.

[He goes out.]

PAUDEEN

Where did he say I was to put the hay I got under the hedge?

SHEELA

Where the cows are (*she turns to him*). O how can your mind keep on the hay and the hedge? Ay, it's because it's simple you are. Why do they call you a fool? Why do they call him a fool, Aislinn?

AISLINN

Because his mind can keep only on the one thing, maybe.

SHEELA

We can only see the hay that's in his hands; but they're all foolish then. Paudeen, they that gathered many thoughts while in the womb are as foolish now as you are.

PAUDEEN

(*Drawing his foot across the floor.*) But sure I'm a clean, well-built boy, anyway, woman of the house?

SHEELA

Ay, that's true, Paudeen.

AISLINN

Go back to the bench, Paudeen, and leave Sheela to herself.

[*Paudeen goes and sits at the fire. He lifts a stick from the hearth and begins to notch it with a knife.*]

AISLINN

I don't think Fardorrougha is so hard after all.

SHEELA

His heart opened to you, Aislinn.

AISLINN

And do you think he would surely give you the rough word ?

SHEELA

O Aislinn, pray that it may never come to that. The thought of a harsh word from him has come to me again and again like some dark bird.

AISLINN

Why do you dread it so much ?

SHEELA

It is raining outside, and the desolation of the rain is near me. If he gave me the harsh word, the desolation of the rain would be around me. O glad, bright child of my dream, tender, shining apple blossom. What fruit would you make, and the desolation of the rain around me.

*[Three women come in, two have children
by the hands, one has a child in her arms.]*

SHEELA

What can I do for ye, women ?

FIRST WOMAN

We've eaten only nettles and roots since the want came, and our children droop.

SECOND WOMAN

You do not know what it is to see a child droop.

THIRD WOMAN

God has not opened doors of madness and pain for you.

[Sheela takes a vessel and holds it to a child, who drinks.]

FIRST WOMAN

Do not forget my child.

SHEELA

Take what is in my house, women.

[She opens the bin and fills a woman's apron with measures of corn; the other women hold out their aprons. Sheela fills them.]

FIRST WOMAN

May God heap up store for you. May you have clan with store. May the earth be fruitful for you, and you fruitful for the earth.

SECOND WOMAN

May God be with your husband when his hand scatters the seed, that his labour may be light and

prosperous, and may your own labour be light, and watched by the Mother of God.

[The women go to the door.]

THIRD WOMAN

That this may be your reward ! As if you had given the corn to the Mother of God.

SHEELA

O women, who am I that ye pray for me ?

[The women go out. Sheela stands as if rapt. Aislinn goes to her.]

AISLINN

Sheela, there is no more corn.

SHEELA

But God has love and pity for us.

AISLINN

The bins, Sheela ?

SHEELA

O hush ! There is the moan of the cattle, and there is Paudeen who brings hay to the cattle. My heart is heavy again.

AISLINN

Fardorrougha is in the barn.

SHEELA

Fardorrougha ! I had forgotten him ! God protect me !

[She is stunned. She goes to the door and watches the rain.]

SHEELA

The rain, the rain! The black ragged sky, and the poor wasted ground! O how could there be any others than Paudeen. *[Paudeen rises.]*

PAUDEEN

But you said I was a clean, well-built boy, woman of the house.

SHEELA

I said it, Paudeen. Open the bins, Paudeen. *[Paudeen lets down the front of the bins and they are shown to be empty.]*

PAUDEEN

O what will we tell Fardorrougha? Can any of you think of a story to tell Fardorrougha? He'll be in on us in a minute, and we without a word in our heads.

SHEELA.

We can tell him no story at all, Paudeen.

AISLINN

Listen, Paudeen. Maybe we could keep him outside for a while.

SHEELA

No, Aislinn, there would be no good in that either. *[Sheela goes to the fire.]*

SHEELA

It was the right I did. Their children crowd

around them now. O children, I would give ye bread again and again.

AISLINN

O Sheela, Sheela, the Mother is with you surely.

SHEELA

I, too, had my mind on one thing. I hardened to make things easy for myself. It's not "God protect me" I should be saying, but "God forgive me".

[She goes to the door. Shawn of the Bog is standing outside.]

SHEELA

Shawn, my poor man, come in.

[Shawn comes to the door, he is like a wild thing, cowed and beaten.]

SHAWN.

Fardorrougha told me to wait on him.

[Sheela takes Shawn to the fire. Aislinn takes down the rosary from the shrine. Paudeen goes to the door and waits.]

SHEELA

(To Shawn). And what did Fardorrogha promise you?

SHAWN

He promised me what corn he has here. I'm giving him my wool and loom for it.

SHEELA

He has no corn here, but you will not go empty-handed for all that.

SHAWN

It's well for little Aislinn that is with you.

SHEELA

Aislinn, come here and talk to Shawn. Shawn needn't be anxious nor fretted.

AISLINN

(Coming to her) And you have no need to be anxious, Sheela.

SHEELA

I'm anxious no more, little Aislinn.

AISLINN

Do you mind that the Mother herself went into a strange country.

SHEELA

It was well for them that could comfort Her then.

AISLINN

She said to a woman like you : " Give to the women that follow, and whatever you give to them you will give to me, who carry the Saviour of the world."

SHEELA

I mind that, Aislinn.

[Paudeen comes from the door.]

PAUDEEN

The rain isn't falling any more, and Fardorrougha himself is coming in.

SHEELA

Open the bins, Paudeen.

[Paudeen opens the bins. When he opens the middle bin, corn gushes out. Sheela and Aislinn kneel down. Paudeen, too, kneels down. Fardorrougha comes in. Fardorrougha crosses himself.]

SHAWN.

Why do you cross yourself, Fardorrougha?

FARDORROUGHA

When I came to the door I saw a woman there. She was like Sheela, and she was like One from above.

SHAWN

I saw no woman at the door.

FARDORROUGHA

She held out a child to me, Shawn.

[Sheela rises. Aislinn and Paudeen rise, too. Sheela holds out her hands to Fardorrougha.]

FARDORROUGHA

Sheela !

SHEELA

See what I hold out to you, Fardorrougha !

FARDORROUGHA

Sheela, I see !

SHEELA

And look at the corn, Fardorrougha.

FARDORROUGHA

Sheela, let you bestow this corn on Shawn, and the corn that's outside I will bestow on the people.

[Sheela takes Aislinn to her.]

SHEELA

The fields will break into corn because of the love and pity God has for us.

The Scene Closes.

EILIS : *A WOMAN'S STORY*

I FOUND Eilis Nic Ghabhrain in my sister's house one autumn evening, and she told me this story. Eilis was knitting the stockings of the house. She arose and welcomed me when I came, and I shook hands with her without realising who the woman was.

My sister Ellen was baking the bread for the men who were coming in from the fields, and I went over to the fire. "Had you any luck with your fishing?" my sister asked.

"None at all," said I; "your man will think less of me than ever now."

My sister spoke to our neighbour: "Myles says that the student here has too much dead knowledge to be any good," she said.

"Your man never thought much of them that are fond of books," the woman replied.

"You ought to give Eilis a book," said Ellen to me, "she's very fond of reading."

I took a book from my store in the window and brought it to Eilis. It was *The Story of Ireland*.

"God will reward you," she said. "One gets an indulgence for lending a good book." I was

struck by the way she said this and by her eager manner. I took over a stool and sat by the woman.

She had been reading a story in the summer, and she began to tell me the story eagerly. It was commonplace enough as written, probably a story out of some English paper, but Eilis told it as a folk tale, and it became full of colour and wonder. I knew by her gesture and by her care for the good word that she knew those who had listened to the poets and who heard the talk of the scholars. She had the old culture, I thought, so I said to her—

“*Ṭá an Ṣaeóitṣe aṣat?*” (“You have the Irish?”)

“*máire, bfuil ré aṣat féin, a míc?*” she said.

My sister turned from the fire when she heard the Irish words.

“Eilis can talk Irish to you,” she said, “though it must be a long time since she spoke any.” Eilis, I could see, was making a phrase to take my fancy.

“*Ḑfuil tú pórtá fóir?*” (“Are you married yet?”) she said with a girl’s laugh.

“*ní féiríu liom bean o’fáṣail*” (“I can find no woman to take me,”) I said.

“Acushla,” said Eilis, taking up her work, “It’s a long time since I spoke the Gaelic. The words are like the words of my old songs; I can hardly bring them to mind.”

I knew her for Eilis Nic Ghabhrain—Elish Mac Govern, as the people would call her. The Mac Govern name had associations for me. The culture I care for most is that culture which the Irish peasantry still hold, fragments of some long-descended civilisation, Celtic or what you will. Now Feidhliamidh Mac Gabhran (Phelim Mac Govern), the brother of Eilis, was, to my mind, a representative of the best days of native culture. Besides this he was a personality. Phelim Mac Govern was a contemporary of Eugene O'Curry, and I think had many affinities with that great peasant scholar. That was the time of the peasant's entrance into affairs. A nation had been born in the shadow of past defeats and was beginning to stir. As yet the struggle was for a little security, a little knowledge, a little toleration. The farmers of Ireland were closing up for the bitter struggle with feudal privilege. They had not enough detachment to realise the nation. Phelim Mac Govern, a poet and a scholar, understood the national idea, and this brought him into frequent conflict with the interests growing up in the peasant community. He was often the object of powerful satire, for his neighbours delighted in a vigorous presentation of certain humours, and Phelim was always good material. However, he was a personality to the people, and it was likely that he

would be a personality to their children. His poems are still in the minds of some of the older people in the Midlands. "The Lament for William Conroy, who was transported," is the best of Phelim Mac Govern's poems.

He had met his end long before my meeting with Eilis. It was a tragic end, but that does not concern this story. I knew Phelim for a while when he was old. He used to repeat Latin poetry for me, and passages from the Irish version of the Iliad. His sister, too, had brought something down from the old culture. I gave more attention to Eilis. There was grace and charm about this woman of eighty. Generally the old women in the country have the manner that comes from a fine tradition. They have the repose that comes with age, the acceptance and the trust. Eilis had these, and some other grace as well; a happy laugh, a gesture that seemed out of her girlhood, something wayward. My sister was minding the bread and the children were quiet. Eilis had quieted them. She kept notice of the children, and now and then she would speak to them, or give them a task.

"Indeed it was our house you were in, the day you stood out of the rain," said Eilis, "and it was my daughter you saw. It is desolate now, my house, and far away from the people. There's no comfort in looking at the fields, for they're given

over to the rain, I think. My daughter married a man from the town, a dark man. I don't understand him at all, and how could I, for he's not like another. He takes no notice of the land, and I don't think he understands it at all. He'd say, 'Here's a paper for the reading woman,' or, 'make room for the learned woman,' by way of making mock of me.

"I think I'm like little Maggie here, who does be longing for a house by the roadside, the way she could be watching at the people pass. Often I see the house I was born in. It was white, and high in the friendly County of Fermanagh. There were trees round the house, and inside there was room after room. I had a room to myself. Hadn't I the courage to leave the place where I was a girl, and to come here with a strange man, marrying away, and so far from my own people ?

"The people here are good, and over good, and Michael Conroy, my husband, was the best of them all. A man that wouldn't let me break a sod of turf across my knee, he took such care of me. It's no wonder I got fond of him, though for long enough my girl's heart was back in Fermanagh. Trouble grew up there. It's a long time ago, and I don't think you could have heard of it. An election brought the trouble on. A man from the people went up against the landlord, and so the

gentry tried to frighten the people. My father was asked to vote for the landlord, but he wouldn't go with that party at all. They broke him of his lands, and they put him out of his house, and they destroyed his trade with that. He had rich lands, and they were the greatest loss maybe, but I can't help thinking of the house that was so white and so fine. There were trees round it, as I told you, and you would have to open seven gates before you came to the door. Twelve of my father's children could sit down at his table. My father was a weaver by trade, and eighteen worked in his house, getting good money for their work and their yarn. My father's father, and seven fathers beyond that, had lived there, and eight women of our name had kept fire on the hearth. Maybe the thorn bushes that the travelling man told me about are growing out of that hearth now. God have mercy on the people whose hearts and hands went against that house.

“Michael Conroy was good to me, and he was good to my people. When my father was broke of his lands he had his trade still. Michael built him a house behind our own so that my father would have a place to work in. Then my father lived behind us, and he began to get the custom of the neighbours ; but he was broken in strength, and it wasn't months before he got bad. In a while it came

to the priest's turn, and my father was anointed. I said to my man : 'If my father is to die, I would like him to die under our roof.' Michael stood up, the man who never denied me anything, and he went to the door. Something put it into my mind to go over to him again, 'It will bring a blessing on our children,' I said. He went out.

"In a while Michael was back. He carried my father across the fields. 'Sister,' said he (he always called me sister), 'wipe the sweat off my face.' My father was on his back, and I wiped the sweat off my man's face. We put my father to bed, and he died in the night. The week after Michael Conroy, my husband, was buried.

"There was no child, and there was no blessing on the house. I ran away from the house for the comfort of my mother. She was living with a son of her's in the County Cavan. Many's the time after that my head was on her lap. I could hear them say, 'She's too young to be a widow. She'll have to marry again if it was only for the sake of the fields.' Then my uncle came to Michael's place, and he got the fields ready. He couldn't get hands enough to spread the manure. He came back and he told my mother that I'd have to marry. I suppose the pain was wearing away. My uncle went to the priest, and they got a good man for me. In a year I was married again, and back in Michael's house."

"The Mother of God pities the women of the world," said Ellen.

"My life was never the same after that," said Eilis. "It was like the looking-glass that falls down and gets broken."

Eilis spoke to the children, and then went on with her knitting in silence. "Well, since that everything I saw was good, except we'd be lonesome at times when someone would die. I wonder are the young so kind? I often think that the world has knocked the friendship out of them.

"And now I'll tell you why I was not so loth to leave the County of Fermanagh. I wasn't fond of Michael Conroy; indeed, I didn't think of him at all when he came to our place. Besides, the boy wanted more of a fortune than my father was willing to give with me. The match was broken off three times for a difference of five pounds, and when he went away I thought I had seen the last of Michael Conroy. One Sunday morning I was coming from early Mass, and my comrade girls were with me. I saw the cars before our door, and the crowd of strangers, and I knew that the Longford people had come back. My mother was watching out for me. She took me aside, and brought me into the barn. 'Conroy agrees, and your father agrees,' she said; 'but, Eilis, my heart, I know that it's Shaun Gorman you're fond of.' 'I'll send for

him, Eilis,' she said, 'and in God's name let the two of you go away together. You could go to his people, and the O'Gormans will be strong enough to mind you.' 'Mother,' said I, 'let me do my father's bidding.'"

"And were you fond of Shaun Gorman?" said I to Eilis. It was so far back now that I might ask.

Eilis said: "There was a time when I neither laughed nor cried, but because of Shaun Gorman."

"Was he fond of you?" I asked.

"How are we to know the heart of a man?" said Eilis. "Shaun Gorman would get up in the morning to see the first smoke out of our house. He knew every scollop in the thatch, he had watched to see me at the door so often."

"And withal you wouldn't take your mother's counsel and go with your love?"

"I told my mother and we standing there in the barn. 'Mother,' I said, 'I'll tell you everything, and then we'll go in to the people. Mother, Shaun Gorman and myself had planned to go away together. Do you remember when Maurya, the servant girl, went over to Shaun's house, and I went for her in the evening? When I went out of the house I brought all I cared for, and I was to go with Shaun Gorman that night. But when I came to the ditch between his fields and our own my knees

failed, and I couldn't pass. I made the sign of the Cross, and I tried again, and again my knees were loosened. Then I said a prayer to the Virgin Mary, and after that every limb of me trembled. I sat down and I could hear the moving of the horse that was to carry us to Shaun's people. The horse was before the door. There was only a ditch between Gorman and myself, but the will of God was against it all. I rose and came away. Maurya came back by herself, and when she came in she said : "Shaun Gorman has done with you, Eilis Mac Govern, for this night you have betrayed him." 'Shaun doesn't believe that now,' I said to my mother. 'After a while I put myself in his way, and I told him. All he said was : "It's no matter now, sure it's over now.'"

"I didn't think loath of leaving the sweet County of Fermanagh, where every face had something to say of Shaun Gorman. I heard the voices making a bargain. Then I heard Michael Conroy, and I liked his voice. I took my mother's hand, and the two of us went in."

THE FLUTE PLAYER'S STORY.

THERE is a road in Connemara which seems to have been invented by some racial spirit, so that the Wanderlust might be perpetuated in us. When you set foot on that road you must go on till the sense of its infinity wearies you. You stop, but your spirit is still upon the road. Sometimes you meet people, women generally, driving asses. They are in twos and threes making some journey together. Once I asked one of these women where the road went when it crossed the hills. She had never heard. I asked her what was the nearest town along the road. She gave it a soft monosyllabic name. I asked her how long, in her opinion, it would take me to get to that town walking. She said, in Irish, "My treasure, if you were to set out now (it was in the early afternoon), you would be in the town with the daylight." I never reached the town with the soft monosyllabic name. One day I went far along the road. I had passed where the lake, a wide, sailless, stretch of water, had made a beach for itself. There was a wide bog on both sides of me, and before me were the silent enfolding hills. I saw a

huddled figure by the grass of a ditch. Before I came near it a cyclist-policeman had swooped down, and the figure was on its feet. A man stood in the middle of the road swaying about, a corpulent figure, big and round of stomach. I perceived that his chin had many folds, that his eyes were small and dead-looking, that in spite of his watch-chain, his manners were obsequious. I could not rid my mind of the impression that this man was somehow connected with the sea. Yet it was impossible to imagine such a creature on board ship. He was of the docks rather than of the ocean. He might be a person who had drowsed and fattened in some little marine store. Evidently the policeman wanted the man to move somewhere ; yet there were three very good reasons for the man's inertia. In the first place, he was as gross as matter ; in the second place, he was lame of a leg ; in the third place, he was drunk. I heard the policeman ask him where he had spent the previous night. The man, bringing, as it were, thought-particles from afar off, informed the law that the town of Ballinasleeve was his last abiding place. Ballinasleeve is in the inhabited country which I had just left behind. "And are you a tradesman?" asked the policeman. With ponderous gravity the man replied. "Well, no, sir, I am not a tradesman. I am a musician, a strolling musician. Sir, I play upon the flute."

A musician ! A strolling player ! One that made music on a flute ! If incongruity is humour, here was comedy indeed. The policeman spoke out of a great amaze ! "A musician—a strolling player ! Do you tell me that ?"

"Sir," said the man, "why would I be deceiving a policeman ? Here is my instrument." He took out of his breast-pocket a flute. The policeman examined it incredulously, while the strolling player, hat in hand, wiped his head with a red pocket-handkerchief. His bald head shone in the evening sun.

"Can you play on this ?" the policeman inquired.

"I can," said the musician. "Drunk or sober I can play upon a flute. Sometimes I can play better than at other times. I could play better after a sleep." The policeman gave him back the flute. The man turned to go. He turned towards Ballinasleeve and the abodes of men.

"Stop," said the law. "I thought you told me that you had spent the night in Ballinasleeve ?"

"Yes, sir ; I spent the night in the town of Ballinasleeve."

"Well, then, move the other way," said the policeman. He mounted the machine. The man swayed about. Then he moved some paces in obedience to the edict. I noted that

the policeman had risen above local and temporal law. He had expressed the eternal and universal law: "You must move to live." In obedience to this the artiste took a few steps into the wilderness. Then he plunged forward, and lay face downwards in the ditch. I went on, meditating on the Law.

.

Coming back along the road I heard the sound of a flute. The artiste was playing to some workers in a far-off bog. His head was bare and shining. The red handkerchief was about his neck. He had worked himself into a mild ecstasy, and was capering about on the road. He sat down by the side of the road. I went and sat near him.

"It's well for you that has the music," I said to him in Gaelic.

"The music that I play is not the best of music," said the man, speaking in Gaelic also. "But the people of the country like it."

"You have good Gaelic," I said, "but I don't think you're a Connaught man."

"I'm a long time on the roads of Connaught," he said. I asked the man for the time. He drew out a large silver watch, and told me the hour. I watched the mountain across the lake. The side of it was brown, steeped in the rays of the sun.

The little bunches of sheep seemed to crawl up and down. I loafed, and invited my soul to loafe. I talked to the musician about fiddles, flutes, and that musical instrument which is becoming national and typical in the province of Connaught, the melodion. The man's soul was not on fire for his art; he talked about it in the most objective and material way. He was certainly no Connaught man. His brain did not fling out words joyously. No word he said hinted the man's dream of himself. There he sat by the side of the road, talking, as if newly taken out of some dark little hand-me-down shop, or some little eating-house, that had for a sign the cup and saucer. Still we gossiped for a long time. At last there was movement on the road. A van was going towards Ballinasleeve, one of these wagons that hold the side show of a fair, and is a travelling house beside. It was a red van with a little flue, drawn by a small and tired horse. A man and woman walked behind the van, and I recognised them for Mr. and Mrs. Antinous, circus people, and friends of mine. The flute player recognised them too, and the recognition brought a dull, malignant look to his face. The couple drew near, Mrs. Antinous was a heavy figure, with a grotesque dress, stiff and black. Her husband was smoking and chirping as usual. How well I remembered Sammy, the Cockney husband of Mrs.

Antinous. Sammy was stone-deaf, but he apprehended certain things by a sort of heightened sensibility. Thus if you said, "What's the drinks?" or "The same again," Sammy drew himself from the remotest corner of the shop, and stood before the counter without a word. I observed the one horse with interest. When I met the couple last in the County of Cavan their horses were five, and had recently been seven. Poor Mrs. Antinous! Her state had shrunk to this little measure. She walked along stolidly, but to me she was a tragic figure.

They greeted me, and I stood talking to them for a while. The flute player remained, big and ugly, in the ditch. Mrs. Antinous recognised him. She stopped her husband's idle chatter, and pointed out the musician. Sammy took the pipe out of his mouth, and twisted on his feet with a sort of pixie-gee. "It's William Ferguson," he said. "The missus's valentine," he said. "She's the honey-suckle and he's the bee; he, he, he!" Mr. Antinous went over to the ditch. "How are you, William," he said. "It's a long time since we met, William." William remained in the ditch as silent as a frog of the marsh. Mrs. Antinous gripped her protector by the hand, and led him away, but Sammy was irrepressible. He turned his head many times as they went down the road. "William," said he, "the missus and myself desires you to after-

noon tea. We'll send the ambulance for you, William." The flute player by this time had gathered his words together, "Go on," said he, "yourselves and your one horse." He turned to me, as I came up, the dull, malignant look still on his face. "It's a hired horse, too," he said; "it's a horse of Flanagan's. Let her go. Maybe I'll stroll into the town to-morrow, and see what herself and him will be doing at the fair. They'll have a little stand, and bottles for the men to throw rings over for penknives and the like. They'll make little at that. There's little drinking in the town now. The whole country has the mission-pledge. Where there isn't drinking there isn't sport, and its no good having a shooting range or a little gallery. They're very low in the world. Would you believe it, sir, I once offered myself in marriage to that woman?"

"You've probably heard about me from certain parties that you are acquainted with, but one story is good until another is told. My name is William Ferguson. I'm from Scotland. I come from the city of Paisley. I was barbering for a while, but I was sacked from that because the proprietor thought I wasn't sociable enough as a barber. Then I was in the betting line, but the police came against me there. I came to Ireland with a gang of harvesters. I played for them on the flute. Then I settled

down to live in Connaught. I got a bed here and there, and the people give me the bit to eat. They have dances at certain places at this time of the year, and they make up a little collection for the musician. As to the woman gone by, I met her after I was a while in Connaught. She was a young widow then, with a husband after dying on her. Her husband was a man you may have heard of. Sarsfield was his name.

“This Sarsfield died, and his widow would be well off if a woman could manage the circus business. She had a tarpaulin that would cover a field. It was worth a lot of money. She had an organ worth close on £50. It was played by steam. She had fifteen horses. I heard about Mrs. Sarsfield in a house where I was taking a drink, and I thought that a job under her would be worth something. I went round, and asked for a job, and she put me collecting at the tent. She put another man to watch me. I held on to the job. You know, sir, that every man likes to settle down in life, and for that reason I had thoughts of marrying Sarsfield’s widow. I stood a likely chance. A woman can’t look after a circus. The men that a woman will pay can’t be relied on. Its the same in the barbering business. Its the same in all lines of business, except a pawn-shop. Now a circus is the most difficult line that a woman could handle, because she

has to watch both men and horses. I used to say to myself, 'You'll have to marry again, my good woman.' I had a good hand with horses, and that's curious when you think I was born and bred in the city of Paisley. However it is, the horses turn their heads to me when I walk down a street. I took charge of that woman's horses. It's likely she'll deny it now, but I tell you, sir, the horses kept in good shape while I had my hand on them. She couldn't help but notice how careful I was of her property. I mentioned marriage to her in a kind of a way, and in a sort of a way she let me know she wasn't ready for it. But she soon saw the way that things would go, and by degrees I prepared her mind for marriage. There was no arrangement between us. There was a sort of an agreement. There was no one except myself she could marry, and she'd have to marry soon.

"It's not the way of men to see anyone else get a head of them in any way. The other men got jealous of me, and they'd never miss a chance of doing an injury to me. They used to leave me to bring the horses to the river by myself. It's hard for a lame man to be legging it after horses. I used to have to give pennies to the boys of the town to give me a hand with the horses. They'd get them down to the river, and draw the water, and I'd manage the horses. It was while I was attending

the horses one day that Antinous came up, and offered to give me a hand. He was a poor raggy fellow without a boot on his foot. He was sacked out of the swinging-boat business. I knew by the way he touched horses that he was never used to live animals. I couldn't shake him off, for the man was deaf, and consequently gave no heed to my sayings. He brought the horses up to the tent, and was there before me. Mrs. Sarsfield was at the van, and he was standing before her, bowing like the clown, and pattering away. He said she was the prairie flower, and mind you, the woman listened to him, though she could have heard the same thing in the ring any night."

"I suppose she gave Antinous a job?" I said.

"She gave him a job," said my friend the flute player. "I think he begged the job off her. He told her he had no mother. She gave him the job, and he and me used to take the horses to the water every day. He knew nothing about horses. I let on to be sick one day, and I let him take the horses to the river by himself. It was a stony place. The horses' legs would have been broken only for some of the men gave Antinous a hand out of the ill-will they had for myself. When he came back Mrs. Sarsfield brought him into tea. I didn't do a hand's turn for her that day, nor the next day, nor the day after. She came out to me then. Mind you, I

didn't want to lose my job, but I told her she'd have to get rid of Sammy Antinous, or else part with myself. If she could see what would happen to her horses she would have given in. But that wasn't to be seen.

"The end of the story happened in the town of Crossgar. There is a shop there owned by a widow woman of the name of Molloy. When I was in the town I did nothing, but I often used to go into Mrs. Molloy's, and have a few glasses to myself without anyone to disturb me. This night I went in. I had the flute in my hand, and I made my way over to the counter. Before I sat down I looked round, and I saw Sammy Antinous and Mrs. Sarsfield sitting on a bench. Sammy asked me to have a drink, but I refused him. I turned round, and I offered Mrs. Sarsfield what was becoming to a lady, a glass of wine. She accepted my offer, and Sammy carried over the glass to her. I didn't drink anything myself, but I sat and watched her for a long time. 'Mrs. Sarsfield,' I said to her, 'this young man can't hear us, so we may as well talk now. Look at him and look at me. He has no head, Mrs. Sarsfield. I'm weak on the legs, but my head is sound. If you want to keep your horses sound marry me, and let me look after them.' She didn't drink at all, but she sat there very miserable. 'I don't know how it is,' she said, 'but I'm more

used to this young man than I'm used to you.' Sammy was trying to listen all the time. 'I'm as used to horses,' he said, 'as horses are used to oats. I was managing horses when I was only up to William's leg.' 'They were wooden horses,' said I. 'He'll soon get used to live horses, Sammy will,' said the woman. She was very foolish. To the present time Sammy Antinous treats all manner of living horses as if they were wooden horses. Sammy got up to go to the counter, and I saw that Mrs. Sarsfield slipped the money into his hand. I knew she'd have him after that, and there was no use in me waiting on. I turned to that woman, and I spoke words to her that brought the blush to her face. 'Ma'am,' said I, 'I'm sorry to see you behave in the way that a respectable woman would not behave. You're marrying that young man, not that he might keep your little business together, not that he might be a protection to you, not that he might look after your horses. You're marrying him out of the passion of women,' I said; 'and, mark my words, you will call the day cursed. Babylon fell,' I said, 'and Rome fell, and the Scarlet Woman of Rome fell, and you'll fall likewise.' I said no more. I let them go out. I drank small whiskies, and when I wakened they were gone from the town. At the next station my words became true. A horse broke its leg at the

watering place. Ever since they lost horses, one here, and two there. She's going into the town now with a hired horse, without a tarpaulin, and without an organ. I doubt if she'll make enough to get the van drawn out of the town."

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The flute-player ended his story as the wandering moon lifted its fantastic shape above the lake.

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